

REQUEST for ASSISTANCE:

FRANKLIN'S GROUND SQUIRRELS and PRAIRIE VOLES

If you have seen **FRANKLIN'S GROUND SQUIRRELS** (FGS) on your properties, I am very interested in documenting their current locations along with any past observations. FGS are listed in Wisconsin as a Special Concern Species. I began searching for FGS in 1995 as part of a small mammal inventory on State Natural Areas and Nature Conservancy prairies. Several of the sites that historically held populations of FGS have been surveyed with live traps, track tubes, and early spring visual surveys.

However, Franklin's ground squirrels have been found at very few of the historic sites (see the map below from Jackson's *Mammals of Wisconsin*). In 2001 I asked for assistance in this survey from WDNR personnel around the state. Many of you expressed a real interest in the FGS. Your help is very much appreciated. THANK YOU! In 2002, CWD work affected almost everyone and the request for FGS observations was put on hold. I am hoping for a renewed effort in 2003.



Franklin's Ground Squirrel



Historical Franklin's ground squirrel distribution

When To Start Looking: Franklin's ground squirrels are semi-colonial and the males come up first, usually in April. The grasses are still short and the males are staking out territories and vocalizing (they sound similar to 13-lined ground squirrels). This is the best time of the year to search by sight and sound.

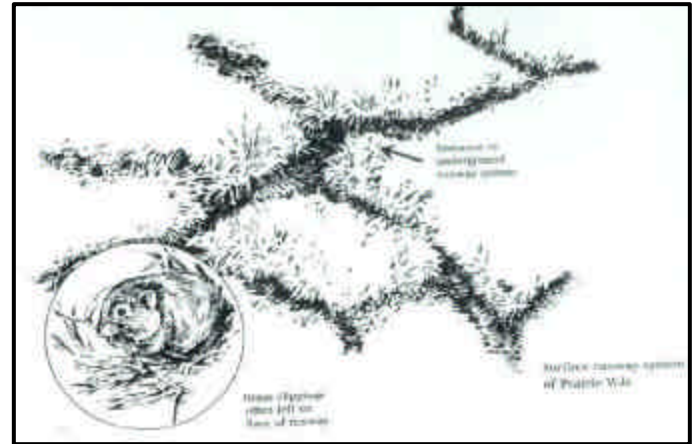
Where To Look: Habitat varies from fence rows to old fields, to even a city park. Several of the newer state mammal guides refer to the FGS as a tallgrass prairie dependent, but recent experience by myself and others in the Midwest and Canada does not support this. The older literature by Jackson, Howell and Seton gives a more accurate habitat description. Optimal natural habitat for FGS includes tall and short grasses near a forest edge, ideally with a wetland, riverbank, or ditch nearby. Low brushy banks are very good. Dikes and old railroad grades serve as dispersal corridors and may be the best places

to start looking. Burrows are usually located near the base of low-growing shrubs and are 2-3" in diameter. FGS remove the dirt from the burrow entrance so they may be quite inconspicuous.

PRAIRIE VOLES were once the dominant small mammal in many of the drier prairie sites in Wisconsin. Today they are a Special Concern Species. During the summers of 1995, 1996 and 1997 Nicola Anthony, Elizabeth Spencer and myself conducted mark-and-recapture surveys for small mammals on sixteen high quality prairie remnants. Prairie voles were found in very low numbers on only four sites. Much older surveys on some of these same sites showed that Prairie voles had been more common in the past.

The Tunnel System: A quick and easy way to survey for prairie vole presence is to walk through an area after a recent burn. Prairie voles build a central nest burrow surrounded by a web of both above and below ground tunnels. The tunnels are between one and two inches wide, and are seen as raised ridges or open-top tunnels in the soil, radiating out from the central nest area.

Look for Prairie vole sign where the soil is drier and the grasses and forbs are broken with patches of bare soil. You can sometimes feel their mini mole-like tunnels squash down under your feet. In the summer time, they often make an above ground nest of woven grass. Prairie voles will also build burrows under scraps of lumber or similar debris. Their distribution in Wisconsin is South of the Tension Zone.



Prairie vole tunnels showing a characteristic web pattern



Historical Prairie vole distribution

The more common and aggressive **Meadow vole** prefers dense, lush stands of grasses and they will exclude the Prairie vole from these areas.

The **Short-tailed shrew** also builds extensive tunnel systems that will be apparent in a variety of habitats (including dry, grassy areas) as the snow melts away, but the wandering tunnels do not have the characteristic "web shape" of the Prairie vole tunnel system.

You can use Town-Range-Section for the location of FGS and Prairie voles; however, if you can add a GPS reading, that is even better. If you are interested in using track tubes for FGS surveys or perhaps doing other small mammal field work, please feel free to contact me.

PLEASE REPORT SIGHTINGS OF FRANKLIN'S GROUND SQUIRRELS AND PRAIRIE VOLES TO:

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